

AN
ENQUIRY
CONCERNING THE
PRINCIPLES OF TASTE,
AND
OF THE ORIGIN
OF OUR
IDEAS OF BEAUTY, &c.

Sunt certi denique fines,
Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum.

Hor.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED BY J. SMEETON, IN ST. MARTIN'S LANE,
CHARING CROSS.

M:DCC:LXXXIX.

*74-344

T O

Mrs. MONTAGUE.

MADAM,

WERE I not prompted by gratitude, admiration, and affection to dedicate to you the best produce of my abilities, which I imagine this to be; yet as the subject of which it particularly treats is moral excellence, the universal voice of mankind with whom your very name is synonymous with virtue itself, must plead my apology for taking this liberty.

Besides, Madam, it was natural for me as an author, to wish to avail myself of the advantage which this address affords me of prepossessing the minds of my readers with an example of that perfection,

fection, to which all my arguments tend, as a preparative or aid to their better comprehending my meaning.

The influence of virtue is every way beneficial! Your character not only secures me from all imputation of flattery, but this public avowal of my admiration of its excellences, conveys an honorable testimony of the consistency of my principles; having endeavoured to inculcate, that the love and esteem of true virtue is true honor: and I may add, that the sweet gratification I feel in thus expatiating in its praise is a sentiment of true happiness!

I am,

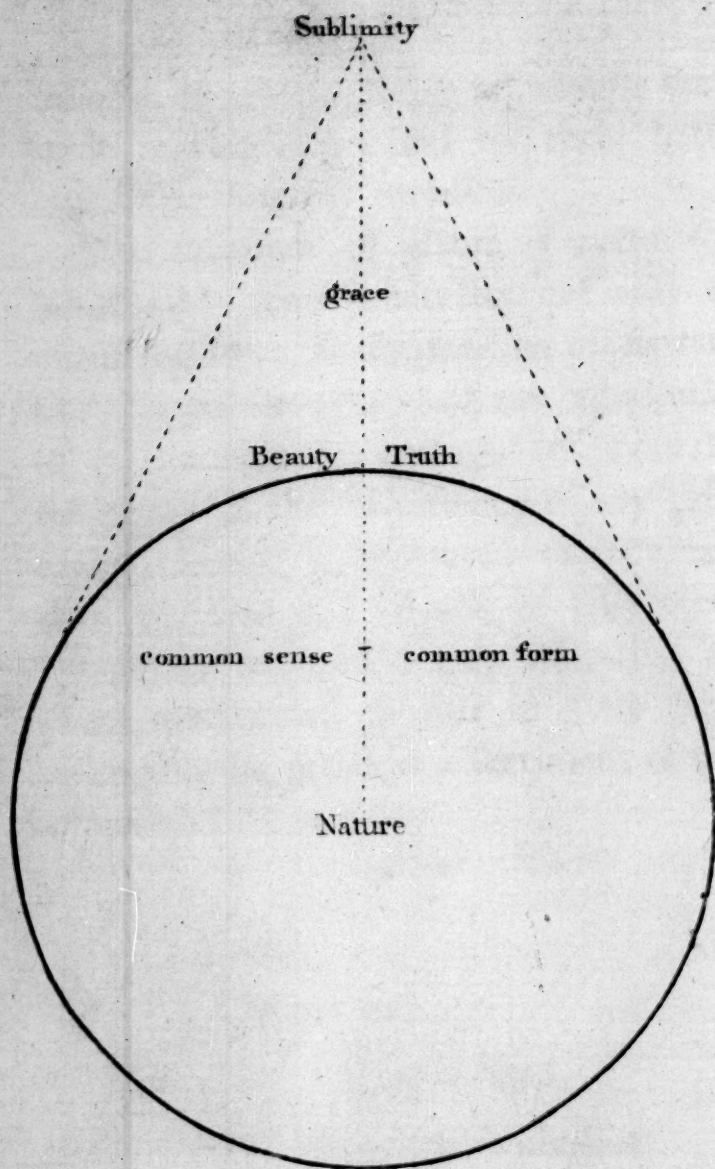
MADAM,

Your obliged,

most obedient,

and most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.



CHAPTER I.

*A SKETCH of the MENTAL SYSTEM
respecting our Perceptions of Taste, &c.*

THE mind of man, introspecting itself, seems as it were (in conjunction with the inscrutable principles of nature) placed in the central point of the creation; from whence impelled by her energetic powers, and illumined by her light, the intellectual faculties like rays shoot forth in direct tendency to their ultimate point of perfection: and as they advance, each individual mind imperceptibly imbibes the influence and light of each, and is by this imbibition alone enabled to approach it.

But though the light of nature and of reason direct the human mind to perfection or true good, yet being in its progress perpetually impeded by adventitious causes, casual oc-
B currences,

currences, &c. &c. which induce false opinions of good and evil; its progressive powers generally stop at a middle point, between mere uncultivated nature and perfection, a medium which constitutes what we call common sense, and which in degree seems as distant from the perfection of the mental faculties, as common form is from the perfection of form, or *beauty*.

On meditating on this subject, and marking the progressive stages or degrees of human excellence, the great leading general truths, or mental rests, as I may call them, **THE COMMON, THE BEAUTIFUL, THE GRACEFUL, and THE SUBLIME**, I have been naturally led to form a kind of diagrammatic representation of their respective distances, &c. &c. which I present to the reader on the opposite page, requesting him to refer to it now and then, as he goes on, in order to facilitate his comprehension of my meaning.

And here it may be necessary to premise, that however whimsical this delineation may appear to my reader, something analagous to the thought may be found in the works of several eminent philosophers, particularly in those

those of Bacon *, and of Locke †: the latter suggesting that the whole system of morality might be reduced to mathematical demonstration; and the former in his treatise on the *ADVANCEMENT of LEARNING*, gives a description of the stages of science very much resembling my delineation of the stages of intellectual excellence or taste.

It could have been no dishonour to me to have been led by such conductors! yet as the truth cannot dishonour me neither, I must aver, that my little system was projected and brought to the exact state it now is in, without my having the least apprehension that anything similar had been suggested before by any person whatever: nor have I in consequence of the discovery I have lately made of the opinions of these respectable authors, added or omitted a single thought in my treatise. But to return from my digression.

In the exact center of my circle of humanity I have placed nature, or the springs of the in-

* *Advancement of Learning*, Book 2d.

† *Essay on human Understanding*, Chap. 3d, Book the 4th, and Chap. 12th, same Book, Sect. 8th.

tellectual powers, which tend in a straight line to its boundary; and on its boundary, I have placed demonstrable beauty and truth, and the utmost power of rules; and midway I have placed common sense and common form, half deriving their existence from pure nature, and half from its highest cultivation as far as art or rules can teach; a conjunction, which would itself be the perfection of humanity, but, that it is mixed with all that is not nature, and all that is not art, and thereby made mediocrity, i. e. *common sense*.

The intellectual powers arriving at the limit of my common circle, i. e. at the limit of the basis of my pyramidal system, where I have placed the fixed proportions of beauty and of truth (if they progress) mount up as a flame with undulating * motion, refining as they advance, and terminate in the pinnacle or ultimate point *sublimity*; forming in the imagination the figure of a pyramid, or cone, from the limit of whose base (on which as I have before observed, I have placed *demonstrable*

* *Undulating*, is the peculiar motion of grace, as well as of flame.

truth

truth and beauty, the utmost power of rules, &c.) from that limit up to the ultimate point of sublimity, I call the region of intellectual pleasure, genius, or taste; and in its center I place grace, whose influence pervades, cheers, and nourishes every part of it, an object which in this ideal region, is similar in its situation and degree to that of common sense, in the common or fundamental region. Grace seems to partake of the perception both of beauty and of sublimity, as common sense partakes of nature and of art. Grace is the characteristic object, or general form of the ideal region, and its perception is the general limit of the powers of the imagination or taste. Few, very few attain the point of sublimity; the *ne plus ultra* of human conception! the *alpha and omega*! The sentiment of sublimity sinks into the source of nature, and that of the source of nature mounts to the sentiment of sublimity: each point seeming to each the cause and the effect, the origin and the end!

Having thus drawn the outline of my pyramidal mental system, I propose to expatiate a little on each point or stage throughout the

the great characteristic line of intellectual power.

The first point, the exact center, *nature*, or the origin of our intellectual faculties admits of no investigation; its idea, as I have observed before, loses itself in the sentiment of sublimity, and we see nothing; and therefore I pass on to an object which is perceptible, *the common general character of humanity, exterior and interior*. I have placed them on a line, because their ideas are so analagous that they unite in one.

Section I. *Common Sense and Common Form.*

PERFECTION seems to be the ground-work both of common sense and of common form; and what prevents each from being perfect, is the adventitious blemishes, the additions to, and the diminutions from, what is perfect, making the too little and the too large. But, these defects being distributed in small portions throughout the general common form and common mind, they constitute an object, whether

whether visible or intellectual, between perfection and imperfection, namely, that of mediocrity, neither exciting admiration nor disgust. . And, as experience gives the general idea of the common and true appearance of the human form, as well to the rustic as to the enlightened philosopher, so consequently does it enable him to see deformity, or what is an unusual appearance in that form.

But, though unusual defects seem to be evident to every eye, it is only to the man of taste and nice discernment, that the same degree of unusual beauties are equally perceptible; which corresponds with my opinion, that the ground-work of humanity is perfection, and that its blemishes only tinge its pure white, not discolour it so much, but, when held at a distance, i. e. in abstract idea, it is still a white, like a sheet of paper or cloth of the most perfect white, regularly checkered over with a variety of figures of every colour, and placed at a distance, appearing to the eye a white, a mezzo common white; and, as any unusual figure, I mean unusually large and opaque, on this mezzo ground, would be
more

more conspicuous than any of a greater degree of transparency, or a more perfect white could be by the absence of any of the figures; so any degree of deformity is more opposite to the general common form than beauty, so any degree of insanity is more opposite to common-sense, than the highest intellectual excellence.

And (to continue my allusion), as those tints, or blemishes, which obscure the ground, must be discharged to make a perfect white, so must the artist, in creating beauty, discharge the blemishes that tinge and obscure the human form, and which give it the character of mediocrity, till the perfect white, or total absence of defect, or beauty, result.

Common sense seems to be diffusive truth, and common form diffusive beauty; and as this diffusion is always existing with us, externally and internally, it is no wonder that we should more easily perceive what is in opposition to it, EVIL, than what is in unison with it, GOOD.

On a line with common form and common sense, I place common ease of body and of mind: unfelt health, unfelt good, or that arising

arising to the degree of *satisfaction* and *content* ; in fine, whatever we call *commonly good*, and requisite for the well-being of humanity.

Section 2. *Beauty and Truth.*

I MEAN that beauty which is demonstrable truth, and that truth which is demonstrable beauty. *Exactitude. Completion. The just medium. The satisfactory rest of the mind. Perfection.* A point, indeed, in which the mind cannot rest ! It must go forward or backward. If the latter, it relapses into the dominion of error ; if the former, it assumes the charms of *design*, or *intention*. The artist arrived at the ultimate limit of rules, or demonstrable truth ; stands as it were between the visible and invisible world ; between that of sense and intellect ; the common and the uncommon ; and his productions will be a conjunction of both. He looks back through all the variety of common nature, and reviews, through the medium of truth and beauty, the various objects it exhibits ; and on its spotless ground, i. e. the

C abstract

abstract idea of nature without defects, which can only exist in idea, he arranges those objects so, as they may best produce the effects he aims at in his art. He does not attempt to obliterate any character in the common circle of nature; but, following her own œconomy, he endeavours, by juxtaposition, &c. to make each subservient to each in creating delight, and giving beauty to the *whole*. But, to descend from the abstract general idea, to the particular idea of beauty, or idea of a particular form; we discard every thing that is not beauty, to compose beauty: but every thing that is not beauty, is not therefore deformity: The wrong we see in each individual we do not call deformity: when it is so, it stands on the limit of the common circle, in opposition to beauty.

From common form seem to originate beauty and deformity; and as they recede from each other in opposite directions, they become less and less like their parent, *common form*, but never totally unlike; for it is their likeness to that form that constitutes the one beauty, the other deformity; for were there no resemblance in deformity to the common form,

form, it would be a different species, and no longer disgust; and none in beauty, it would no longer please.

There is no particular common form, but which, to create beauty, an artist, who studies the perfection of the human form, must improve in some, if not in every part; to affect which, considered as mere form only, rules will suffice; but, considered as grace, it must express a sentiment that no rules can give!

That all feel the same sentiment of admiration for that which they think the most perfect, however the objects may differ, has induced some to believe that beauty is an arbitrary idea, and that it exists only in the imagination! But does it follow, that, because it is not possible for the savage or the man of taste to judge of any object, but as experience enables him to judge, that therefore there is no pre-eminence in that form which is beauty to the one, above that which is beauty to the other?

Somewhere there must exist, whether perceived or not, the perfection, or highest point of excellence of the human form respecting proportion; and somewhere there must exist,

or does at times exist, the highest excellence of its expression, i. e. the moral charm of the human countenance, *grace*.

The artist, who has only seen the beauty of his own nation, will from that form his standard of perfection. But, when he comes to extend his enquiry, when he has viewed the beauty of other nations, particularly that form, and that expression which the Grecian artists (who were probably on a line with the Grecian philosophers) modelled from their ideas of beauty! he will quit his partiality for the beauty of his own country, and prefer that of the Grecian, which I imagine is preferable to that of the whole world! The only criterion to prove it so, I mean its form, would be to select from every nation the most perfect in it, and from that number to choose the most perfect, were this possible to be done, respecting the external form of beauty: it could not respecting the internal expression of beauty, *grace*; for who shall be the world's arbiter of the *ne plus ultra* of grace!

That the artists of all ages and of all nations, have terminated their enquiries after beauty, in that of the Grecian form, is the highest proof

proof that can be given of its superior excellence to that of all the world !

Common form, as I have observed before, is so much nearer beauty than deformity, that it is in abstract idea the model to compose beauty of form from. The *universal* appearance of nature, is to every eye, right, fit, faultless, &c. therefore if every part of the copy be the same, particularly, I mean in the *human form*, beauty of form must result.

The beauty of every part of the human body, forming a *perfect* whole, is analogous to an instrument of music in perfect concord, and mere exactitude of proportion in its parts, exclusive of the idea of mind, would, I imagine, have no more effect upon the spectator, than the mere concord of the strings of an instrument, has on the hearer ; it amounts to no more than blameless right, nor, till influenced by sentiment, can it go farther.

But as we are incapable of separating the idea of the human form from the human mind ; and as the touch of an instrument in perfect concord, gives a presentiment of harmony, so does the perception of the concordance of the parts of a beautiful form, give a
perception

perception of grace. The mind, as I have observed, cannot rest in fixed perfection, the *spotless white*; and its natural transition from beauty must be into the region of grace.

Section 3. *Grace.*

THE principles that constitute grace, genius, or taste, are *one*; which is denominated grace in the object, genius in the production of the object, and taste in the perception of it.

The existence of grace seems to depend more upon the character of mental, than of corporeal beauty. All its motions seem to indicate, and to be regulated by the utmost delicacy of sentiment! I have placed it between the highest sentiment of the human mind, *sublimity*, that no rules can teach, and the highest sentiment that rules can teach, *exact beauty*; the two extremes of the *vrai réel*, and the *vrai idéal*. Grace seems as it were to hang between the influence of both; the irregular sublime giving character and relief

relief to the negative and determined qualities of beauty ; and beauty, i. e. truth confining within due bounds the eccentric qualities of sublimity, forming both to sight and in idea, orderly variety, *the waving line*, neither straight nor crooked. The waving line is the symbol, or memento, as I may say of grace, wherever it is seen, in whatever object animate or inanimate ; and may be justly stiled the line of taste or grace.

The perception of grace seems not to be intirely new, nor intirely familiar to us ; but is as it were, what we have had a presentiment of in the mind, without examining it, and which the graceful object, or action, &c. calls forth to our view. Being so much our own idea, we like to behold it, to dwell upon it ; and yet not being a familiar idea, it creates a pleasing mild degree of admiration.

Grace seems half celestial ; for all the virtues accompany, indeed compose the perception ; for none, I imagine, can have a perception of grace, that has none of the charms of virtue.

The sentiment of grace, caused by the motion of beauty, music, poetry, beneficence, compassion,

compassion, &c. may be ranked as the highest intellectual pleasure the mind is capable of perceiving; and brings with it a sort of undetermined consciousness of the delicacy of our own perceptions in making the discovery, a degree of that glorying that Longinus observes always accompanies the perception of the sublime!

You can no more define grace, than you can happiness. The mind cannot so steadfastly behold it, as to investigate its real properties. Grace is indeed the point of happiness in the ideal region, both because it arises spontaneously, without effort, &c. and because it seems partly *within* our own power, and partly *without* it.

As common sense, in my fundamental circle, seems diffusive truth; so grace, in my ideal circle, seems diffusive sublimity; every perception of the former seems to be tinged as it were, with the colour of the latter.

Section 4. *Sublimity.*

WHERE pure grace ends, the awe of the sublime begins, composed of the influence
of

pain, of pleasure, of grace, and deformity, playing into each other, that the mind is unable to determine which to call it, pain, pleasure, or terror! without a conjunction of these powers there could be no sublimity.

Those only who have passed through the degrees, *common sense*, *truth*, and *grace*, i. e. the sentiment of *grace*, can have a sentiment of sublimity. It is the mild admiration of *grace* raised to wonder and astonishment! to a sentiment of *power*, *out of our power* to produce, or control. *Grace* must have been as familiar to the intellect, in order to discover sublimity, as *common sense* in the common region must have been to the discovery of truth and beauty. In fine, genius, or taste, which is the sentiment of *grace*, and which I have called the common sense of the ideal region, can alone discover the true sublime.

It is a pinnacle of beatitude, bordering upon horror, deformity, madness! an eminence from whence the mind that dares to look farther is lost! It seems to stand, or rather to waver, between certainty and uncertainty, between security and destruction.

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It is the point of terror, of undetermined fear, of undetermined power!

The idea of the supreme Being, is, I imagine, in every breast, from the clown to the greatest philosopher, his point of sublimity!

CHAPTER

CHAPTER II.

*On the ORIGIN of our IDEAS of
BEAUTY.*

IN proportion as the principles of beauty exist in the common form, undetermined to the common eye, so do they exist in common sense undetermined to the common mind. It is cultivation that calls them into view, gives them a determined form, creates the object, and the perception, that

‘ Truth and good are one,

‘ And beauty dwells in them, and they in her*.’

But though all truth resolves into one truth, one beauty, one good, as all colours resolve into one light; though the scientific intellectual colours, classes, or leading principles of science, the *physical*, the *moral*, the *metaphysical*, &c. &c. resolve into intellectual light, beauty, or good; it is, I imagine, the moral truth, that is the characteristic truth of beauty; for were we to analyse the pleasing

* Akenfide.

emotions we feel at the sight of beauty, we should, I imagine, find them composed of our most refined moral affections; and hence the universal interesting charm of beauty. And as those affections refine by culture, hence the different degrees of the sentiments which beauty creates in the rustic, and in the man of taste; the former perceives only the physical charm of beauty, the freshness of colour, the bloom of youth, &c. but to a man of taste the physical pleases only through the medium of the moral. *The body charms because the soul is seen.* Beauty in his breast is the source from whence endless streams of fair ideas flow, extending throughout the whole region of taste, no object of which but is more or less related to the principles of human beauty. But taste, though a subject almost inseparable from that of beauty, I must forbear to enlarge upon in this chapter, as I propose to make it the particular subject of my next.

It is but at that period, at which we begin to perceive the charms of moral virtue, that we begin to perceive the real charms of beauty. It is true a man may attain by experience the knowledge

knowledge of its just proportions, without that concomitant sentiment. He may be unconscious of the characteristic moral charm resulting from the whole: and an artist, I imagine, by habitual practice of the rules which constitute beauty, may produce forms which charm the moral sense of others, without being conscious of it himself; the utmost limit of the rules of the imitative arts being so intimately united with the intuitive principles of taste, or refined moral sense, that the mind in general cannot distinguish where the one ends, or the other begins. The artist who separates them, *leans on the second cause* instead of the first.

As the strongest proof that the moral sense is the governing principle of beauty, we may remark that the human form from infancy to old age has its peculiar beauty annexed to it from the virtue or affection that nature gives it, and which it exhibits in the countenance. The negative virtue innocence, is the beauty of the child; the more formed virtues, benevolence, generosity, compassion, &c. are the virtues of youth and its beauty; the fixed and determined virtues, justice, temperance, fortitude

titute, &c. compose the beauty of manhood ; the philosophic and religious cast of countenance is the beauty of old age. Now were any of these expressions misapplied, i. e. commuted, they would disgust rather than please; without congruity, there could be no virtue; without virtue, no beauty, no sentiment of taste.

And thus the beauty of each sex is seen only through the medium of the virtues belonging to each; the beauty of the masculine sex is seen only through the medium of the masculine virtues; the beauty of the feminine only through the medium of the feminine; the moral sense gives each its distinct portion of the same virtues, but draws a line which neither can pass without a diminution of their specific beauty. The softness and mildness of the feminine expression would be displeasing in a man. The robust and determined expression of the rigid virtues, justice, fortitude, &c. would be displeasing in a woman. However perfect the form, if an incongruity that touches the well-being of humanity mingles with the idea, the form will not afford the pleasing perception of beauty, though the
eye

eye may be capable of seeing its regularity, &c. So far is it from pleasing, that it is the more disgusting from its semblance to virtue, because that that semblance is a contradiction to her laws.

May it not be owing to these expressions so familiar to every eye that the general sense of good taste eternally exists? they are the legible characters of human excellence, no where visible but in the human countenance; every observation of which improves and confirms the moral sentiment or image of beauty implanted by nature in the mind of man.

The origin of the idea of beauty is the same in every breast savage and civilized, every nation's characteristic form or expression of beauty will be a representation or portrait of their characteristic virtue, *their happiness, their good*. Thus in the opinion of the wild savage that face or form will be the most beautiful that assimilates with his idea of savage virtues, &c. *perfections that are placed in bones and nerves*, as that of the most cultivated nations, witness, the Grecians will indicate or portray the most refined mental virtues; and hence we may conclude, if there be any dignity,
any

any truth, any beauty in virtue, there must be a *real* difference, a superior and inferior characteristic power of pleasing in the exterior of the human form.

It is cultivation that gives birth to beauty as well as to virtue, by calling forth the visible object to correspond with the invisible intellectual object. In the face or form of an idiot, or the lowest rustic there is no beauty; and supposing a nation of idiots, and that they never could improve in mental beauty, they never could, I imagine, improve in corporeal, even though their natural form was upon an equality with the rest of mankind; for without sentiment they would not only be incapable of expressing any sentiment analogous to beauty, but wanting the surrounding influence of a moral system, i. e. of education, on the exterior, they could not suppress or veil a semblance incongruous with beauty; what no person felt, no person could teach.

In cultivated nations every precept for exterior appearance from the first rudiments of the dancing-master to the motion of grace, has for its object *mind*, that is, a desire to impress upon the spectator a favourable idea of our mental character; but passed the

the true point of cultivation, they lose with the sentiment of mental excellence that of true beauty: witness the exterior artificial appearance of humanity in a neighbouring nation, which probably is on a par with the most uncultivated rustic. The one does not enough for nature, the other too much; but as the former has an object before him, to which nature herself directs him, the other is receding from it: and, as it is more agreeable, more easy, and more natural, to the human-kind, to learn than to unlearn, I should sooner expect the most uncultivated nation (the negro excepted) to arrive at taste in true beauty than them. The negro-race seems to be the farthest removed from the line of true cultivation of any of the human species; their defect of form and complexion being, I imagine, as strong an obstacle to their acquiring true taste (the produce of mental cultivation) as any natural defect they may have in their intellectual faculties: for, if, as I have observed, the total want of cultivation would preclude external beauty, the total want of external beauty would preclude the power of cultivation. It appears to me in-

E conceiveable

conceiveable that the negro-race, supposing their mental powers were upon a level with other nations, could ever arrive at true taste, when their eye is accustomed *only* to objects so diametrically opposite to taste as the face and form of negroes are! Our being used or not used to the object cannot make us perceive any similarity in the lineaments of their countenance, to the lineaments, if I may so say, of our refined virtues and affections, which alone constitute beauty. And of course their ideas of beauty must be inferior to those of the European.

Beauty is an assemblage of every human charm; yet what we call the *agreeable*, is often more captivating.

The agreeable in person,* is composed of beauties and defects as is the common form, but differently composed. The beauties and defects of the latter are blended into the idea of mediocrity; those of the former are always distinct and perceptible, contrasting each other they engage the attention, and afford a kind of pleasing *re-creation* to the mental faculties; and in proportion as we can bring them to unite with our governing principles of pleasure, they

they create affection, which gives the person a more fascinating charm than beauty itself.

It is the mental character that is the moving principle of affection; and any strong peculiarity, that contradicts not the moral sense, i. e. is not *unnatural*, gives the object an accessory charm, that raises the affection to passion. The object is at once the common and the uncommon; a union, which constitutes all we call excellent, all we admire!

The perception of the charms of the agreeable, seem to be wrought up to excellence by the operation of our own powers. We ourselves have blended its beauties and defects into the sentiment of beauty, *pleasure*; and hence, probably, the strength and durability of the passion which it creates. Beauty, on the contrary, is composed to our hands, *full*, *perfect*, and *intire*. Its idea is also a compound of the common and the uncommon, being at once like and unlike the general form; but inherently it has no contrast, and therefore affords no recreation, no pleasing exercise to the mental faculties; there is nothing re-create, nothing to wish; and hence

the instability of the passion which it inspires. Perfect beauty is like perfect happiness, lost as soon as it is attained.

It is I imagine to the principles of the masculine and the feminine character, that we owe the perception of beauty or taste, in any object whatever, throughout all nature, and all art that imitates nature; and, in objects which differ from the human form, the principles must be in the extreme, because the object is then merely symbolical. Thus the meekness of the lamb, and the high-spirited prancing steed; the gentle dove, and the impetuous eagle; the placid lake, and the swelling ocean; the lowly valley, and the aspiring mountain, &c. It is the feminine character that is the sweetest, the most interesting image of beauty; the masculine partakes of the sublime. Thus it will be found, that, in every object that is universally pleasing, there exist principles that are analogous to those that constitute beauty in the human species; and that its appearance does always, in some degree, move the affections, though the mind may be unconscious of its similitude to any idea in which the affections are concerned.

cerned. But the test of the object's possessing the principles of beauty, is when we are able to assimilate its appearance with some amiable interesting affection; and according as that affection prevails in the breast of the spectator, it will appear with an additional power of pleasing.

From association of ideas, any object may be pleasing, though absolutely devoid of beauty, and displeasing with it. The *form* is *then* out of the question; it is some *real* good or evil, with which the object, but not its *form*, is associated.

It is observable, that those animals I have mentioned (and I imagine all animals that are symbolical of our affections have the same) have a double character of beauty, or reference to the affection that is moved: i. e. their form, and their disposition, exactly corresponding with each other. Probably on that union depends their power of pleasing; their *form alone*, so different from human beauty, could not sufficiently engage the attention, or afford the interesting perception, which the consistency of truth does in the *intire* of an object.

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Every object of taste, has *at least* a double reference to mental pleasure, whether the object in the philosophical scale of our perceptions, belongs to those of *sense* or *intellect*. Thus, the beauty of the rose would not certainly be so perceptible to us, wanting its fragrance, and with a nauseous smell, would not probably be admitted, as I may say, into the rank of *agreeableness*, though it is in reality a beautiful and pleasing object; nor, supposing the thistle, or any ugly flower, possessed of the fragrance of the rose, should we therefore think it an object of taste, any more than we can think the form of an elephant beautiful, though endued with almost intellectual beauty.

In the form and colour of flowers, there appears to me a striking analogy to the character of human beauty. They afford an ocular demonstration, in the pleasure with which we contemplate their particular forms, that the pleasure we receive from the beauty of the human form, originates from mental character: witness the charm of the infant-innocence, of the snow-drop, of the soft elegance of the hyacinth, &c. and on the contrary, our dislike of the gaudy tulip, the robust,

robust, unmeaning, masculine piony, hollyhock, &c. &c.

It is, I imagine, from a resemblance to some pre-conceived idea of beauty in the human species, that we are particularly pleased with the sight of one flower more than with another, though the mind is unconscious of the cause. And thus the pleasure caused by the apparent beauty of every object throughout the system of human perceptions, is, according to my sentiment of that pleasure, the same intellectual principle, *moral good*: however diversified, modified, or diminished, even to an unconsciousness, or almost imperceptible degree of relation to it. In fine, the true principles of beauty in every object may be all *resolved* into the same principle.

I have no more doubt that the principles of beauty are moral, than that the principles of happiness are moral. It is the perception of true beauty in its various modifications that makes up the sum of human happiness; and hence the diversity of opinions concerning beauty, but which, however diverse, are never contradictory, but as mens opinions in morals are so; for every view of beauty assimilates
with

with some good, and of course must be in unison. But to conclude.

If in the human system there exists a principle which constitutes true pleasure, that principle must be that which constitutes human excellence; and if the visible object which excites true pleasure must necessarily possess the principles of true pleasure, then must every object which universally and invariably pleases, be relative to the principles that constitute human excellence, morality.

Whatever appear to each individual the most excellent in the human system, at once constitutes his idea of *happiness*, of *morality*, and of *beauty*; and all mankind, I imagine, would agree in the same idea, had all the same opportunities of seeing and knowing what was excellent.

In fine, as the moral sense of mankind is coarse or refined, so will be their taste of beauty.

Of this I am certain, that true refinement is the effect of true virtue, that virtue is truth, and good, and that beauty dwells in them, and they in her.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER III.

On TASTE.

TASTE seems to be an inherent impulsive tendency of the soul towards true good; given by nature to all alike, and which improves in its sentiment, as the reasoning faculties improve in their knowledge of what *is* true good.

All the human faculties, are as one may say, constituents of the faculty or principles of taste: but its perception seems to be shared between the judgement and the imagination: to the former seems to belong the truth, or good, of an object of taste; to the latter its beauty or grace; and the *stamina vitæ*, or radical principles of taste, exist, I imagine, in the natural affections of the soul.

What the impulsive spring is, which moves the affections invariably to perceive pleasure in the perception of good and beauty, and

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disgust in the perception of evil or deformity, I leave to my metaphysical readers to determine. I am afraid to give it an appellation so incongruous to the general idea of taste, as that of conscience! And yet, I will venture to say, that, if my readers will give themselves the trouble to analyse the grateful sensation or sentiment, we call taste, i. e. their sentiment of what is truly good, beautiful, right, just, ornamental, honourable, &c. &c. they will find it to originate from, and end in, some moral or religious principle. Indeed, some objects (the highest in the scale of our perceptions of excellence) bring with them an immediate conviction of the truth of this assertion: witness the devotional sentiment which the view of the main ocean inspires; the rising and setting sun; the contemplation of the celestial orbs, &c. witness the noblest object of the creation, when viewed in his highest character! Does not the perception of human excellence immediately relate to the source of all excellence!

The general diffusion of intellectual light throughout mankind, constitutes rationality; and the aggregated excellence, or light of rationality,

rationality, constitutes morality. It is, I imagine, in this second or purified light, that taste begins to exist. It is at this period of cultivation, that the mind begins to perceive its true good; that the natural affections rectify, methodise, and refine; in a word, become moral affections, through whose medium, i. e. *the moral sense*, the soul perceives every object of taste.

Taste is intellectual pleasure, an approving sense of truth, of good, and of beauty. The latter seems the visible or ostensible principle of the two former; and is that, in which the universal idea of taste is comprised. All are pleased with the sight of beauty; but all are by no means sensible, that the principles that make it pleasing, that constitute a form beautiful, are those, or to be more intelligible, relate to those, that constitute man's highest excellence, his first interest, his chief good! Few indeed, even among those who possess taste, if they have not accustomed themselves to investigate its principles, will readily conceive that they are thus deeply rooted in the mental frame. Indeed, the generality of mankind, seem rather to think that taste has no

principles at all; or if any, that they begin and end with the prevailing mode, fashion, &c. of the times. A notion, which though in the highest degree absurd, corroborates my opinion, that the universal perception of taste, (the true and the false) exists in the idea of honour.

The compound word, or phrase, *le vrai idéal*, universally adopted to denote an object of taste, is the most exact and literal definition of its sentiment that can be conceived: for it implies the union of the judgment and the imagination, without which, there could be no sentiment of taste. The judgement, as I observed, perceives the truth of the object, the imagination its beauty: they may be said to relate to each other in the perception of an object of taste, as a luminous polish does to the substance from whence it proceeds; the substance can exist without its polish, but the polish cannot exist without its substance. The perception of taste, seems to me, if I may so express myself, to be illusive, but not erroneous: In a word, to exist in our idea of true honour, i. e. in the polish, lustre, or ornament of true virtue.

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As the universal idea or sentiment of taste, is honour; so the universal object of its perception, is ornament, from the object, whose excellence we contemplate, as an ornament or honour to human nature; to every object, which in the slightest degree indicates the influence of that excellence. Take away the idea of that influence in the moral sphere, and taste is annihilated; and in the natural sphere, take away the idea of divine influence, and taste cannot exist. Every sentiment of taste, as I observed before, ultimately relates to the one or to the other of these principles: indeed, strictly speaking, as the moral relates to the divine, it may be said ultimately to do the same.

In the progress of civilization, the polishing principle, which I call taste, is chiefly found in the highest sphere of life, highest both for internal and external advantages: wealth accelerates the last degree of cultivation, by giving efficacy to the principles of true honour; but it also accelerates its corruption, by giving efficacy to the principles of false honour, by which the true loses its distinction, becomes less and less apparent,

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may by degrees less and less existent. Wealth becoming the object of honour, every principle of true taste must be reversed. Hence avarice, and profusion, dissipation, luxurious banqueting, &c. supersede the love of œconomy and domestic comfort, the sweet reciprocation of the natural affections, &c. hence the greatest evils of society, the sorrows of the virtuous poor, *the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes*; in a word, the general corruption of morals, and of course of true taste.

The vulgar, who are strangers to the internal principles of honour; always annex their ideas of taste to the external appearances of the highest rank of life, which being easily acquired, particularly that of dress, the prevalency of modes and fashions, however absurd, is universally adopted. Those of false taste, adopt them to attract notice; those of true taste to avoid it. But at this present, the difficulty of avoiding singularity in dress, is I imagine much to be lamented by women of taste and virtue, the prevailing mode of feminine attire, appearing to me to be diametrically

trically opposite to every principle of feminine excellence !

I could expatiate largely on this subject, but it would be inconsistent with my plan, which the reader may perceive, throughout the whole work, to be a mere outline only.

The three co-existing principles of taste, virtue, honour, and ornament, run through all its perceptions. Their triple union cannot be broken ; but taste is nominally distinguished by the one or the other, according as its objects, situations, circumstances, &c. vary. Ornament and honour seem the public character of taste ; virtue to be the private and domestic, where, though unperceived by the vulgar, *to the eye of taste* she appears in her highest ornament, highest honour.

Taste seems to comprize three orders or degrees in its universal comprehension.

The first is composed of those objects which immediately relate to the divinity, among which man claims the preeminence, when viewed in his highest character : witness the inexpressible charm which the natural virtuous affections of the soul inspire, when moved by some strong impulse, such as parental tenderness,

ness, filial piety, friendship, &c. &c. Do they not unite the moral sentiment to the divine?

The second is the immediate external effects of true taste, or moral virtue, in the social sphere; the order, beauty, and honour, which every object derives from its influence; and, of course, its sentiment must be intimately related to moral excellence.

The third and last degree is general ornament and honour, appearing in fashions, arts of decoration, &c. &c. objects which seeming not immediately to effect the interests of humanity, the taste they exhibit in this sphere appears as an uncertain light, sometimes bright and sometimes obscured; or rather as refracted rays of taste, broken by the general love of novelty and superfluity; two principles which, though they are, to a certain degree, essential to exterior ornament, and the sentiment of true taste, are those in which taste always begins to corrupt. To illustrate my meaning: true ornament seems equally to partake of the idea of utility and superfluity, and every sentiment of taste seems equally to partake of the idea of novelty and of custom; for, were the object perfectly

perfectly familiar to us, we should feel no degree of admiration, without which we could feel no sentiment of taste; and, were it totally new, unlike any thing we had ever seen, it would excite wonder instead of admiration, which is a sentiment as distant from taste as the love of fame is from the love of true honour.

This sphere, the last in my scale of the perceptions of taste, and which borders upon every thing that is contrary to its laws, is properly the sphere of fancy, which seems an undisciplined offspring of taste; sometimes sporting within the bounds of parental authority, and sometimes beyond them. Fancy seems to bear the same affinity to taste as pleasure does to Happiness.

Every object of taste is relative to some principle of excellence from which it derives its power of pleasing; of course, the highest sentiment of taste must exist in the relative principle to our highest object of excellence.

True ornament is, to the eye, what eloquence is to the ear: their principles throughout are one, the truth or beauty of which exist in its exact relation or adaptation to the object it a-

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dorns, constituting the *just*, the *true*, the *beautiful*, objects, or qualities, which, in the conscious eye of taste, *relate* to moral beauty. The preception of the first relation, i. e. the adaptation of any thing ornamental to the object it adorns, may, in a great measure, be learned by habit and general observation; but the higher relation, the second concoction (as one may say) of its principles, the moral relation, is the immediate operation of taste.

Ornament and harmonious sound are pleasing to the corporeal sense, but, when wanting a relative object, please but for a short time; and, if incongruously joined to an object, i. e. to one with which it can have no relation, will, as soon as the understanding perceives the incongruity, become a principle of disgust.

As the virtues differ, in some degree, as the character of the sexes differ*, of course so must the sentiment of taste differ. To the man I would give the laws of taste; to the woman, its sensibility. The taste of the former seems more derived from reason; that of the latter from instinct: witness their impulsive

* Vide page 22.

five maternal affection; that inherent ornament of their sex, modesty; their tender susceptibility of the benevolent virtues, pity, compassion, &c. &c.

Taste, however, is as far removed from mere instinct as from mere reason. I only mean to say, that the taste of the masculine character is rather on the side of reason, or the understanding; that of the feminine on the side of instinct, and, let me add, imagination. The taste of the one and of the other seems to differ as justice does from mercy, as modesty from virtue, as grace from sublimity, &c. &c. And, as exterior feminine grace is the most perfect visible object of taste, the highest degree of feminine excellence, externally and internally united, must of course constitute woman, the most perfect existing object of taste in the creation.

The cultivation of the social moral affections is the cultivation of taste, and the domestic sphere is the true and almost only one in which it can appear in its highest dignity. It is peculiarly appropriated to feminine taste; and I may say, it is *absolutely* the only one in which it can appear in its true lustre. True

taste, particularly the feminine, is retired, calm, modest; it is the private honour of the heart, and is, I imagine, incompatible with the love of fame.

In the present state of society, taste seems to be equally excluded from the highest and from the lowest sphere of life. The one seems to be too much encumbered with artificial imaginary necessities; the other too much encumbered with the real and natural necessities of life, to attend to its cultivation. It is in the former that taste is universally thought to reside, which is because the idea of taste is inseparable from that of honour. It is that, indeed, in which the general taste of a nation is exhibited. It is its face, as I may say, which expresses the internal character of the heart.

In this sphere, namely, the most exalted station of mankind, what true taste it does exhibit, is placed in the strongest point of view; its contrary principles are also the same, particularly so to those who have been rightly educated at a distance from it; to such, the wrong will instruct as much as the right; but it is not I imagine at this period, the proper sphere for the infant mind to expand and improve in.

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The wrong will be too familiar to the mind to disgust; and the right, which may be chiefly confined to the records of taste, *the liberal arts*, will be too remote (wanting the preparatory love of nature and virtue) to please.

It is not I imagine from objects of excellence in the arts, that the mind receives the first impressions of taste, though from them the impressions, we have already received, may be strengthened and improved. The truths they exhibit awaken the recollection of what has pleased us in nature; and we exult in the confirmation of our judgement and taste on finding those objects represented, by genius in their best and fairest light*. Of course, the excellence we perceive in the fine arts, which is always relative to moral excellence, must tend to the improvement of taste.

But, though the arts are thus beneficial to the growing principles of taste, respecting a few individuals, it is well known that their esta-

* L'esprit de l'homme est naturellement plein d'un nombre infini d'idées confuses du vrai, que souvent il n'entrevoit qu'à demi; et rien ne lui est plus agréable, que lorsqu'on lui offre quelque-une de ces idées bien éclaircies et mise dans un beau jour. BOILEAU, Préface.

blishment in every nation has had a contrary effect on the community in general ; for, in proportion to the encouragement given them, as that encouragement immediately promotes two of the most pernicious principles that can affect the human heart, the most destructive of moral virtue, namely, the love of fame and the love of riches, a general diffusion of corruption must insue, and of course the extinction of the natural principles of taste, or relish of the human soul of what is truly beautiful, truly honourable, truly good.

To conclude. I will not presume to say, that a man without taste is without virtue ; but I think I may venture to affirm, that it is only as he can have virtue without loving virtue, that he can have virtue without having taste ; the definition of taste being, according to my apprehension of its sentiment, *the love of virtue*. And, as that love springs from, and tends to, the source of all virtue, all good, may I not add, that it is but as a man can be religious without devotion, that a man can be religious without taste ? the sentiments of devotion, seeming to be an aggregation of our
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most virtuous, most refined, conscious energies
of the soul, in that awful vertical point sub-
limity !

‘ From thee, great God, we spring, to Thee we tend,
‘ Path, motive, guide, original, and end !’

JOHNSON.

THE END.

A Copy of a Letter from Dr. JOHNSON to JOSEPH BANKS, Esq; (now Sir JOSEPH BANKS) on the Subject of a Collar for his Goat, which had been twice round the world.

SIR,

I RETURN thanks to you and Dr. Solander for the pleasure I received in yesterday's conversation*. I could not recollect a motto for your goat†, but I have given her a distich. You, Sir, may some time have an epic poem from some happier hand, than that of,

SIR,

Your most obedient,
humble servant,

SAMUEL JOHNSON.

March 26, 1772.

* At Sir Joshua Reynolds's.

† Perpetui, ambitâ bis terra,
Præmia lactis,
Hæc habet, altrici capra secunda.
Jovis.

A Copy

A Copy of a Letter written by Dr.
JOHNSON to the Right Honor-
able CHARLES JENKINSON (now
Lord HAWKESBURY), in behalf
of Dr. Dodd.

SIR,

Since the conviction and condemna-
tion of Dr. Dodd, I have had by the inter-
vention of a friend some intercourse with him;
and I am sure I shall lose nothing in your
opinion by tenderness and commiseration.
Whatever be the crime, it is not easy to have
any knowledge of the delinquent without a
wish that his life may be spared, at least when
no life has been taken away by him.

I will therefore take the liberty of suggest-
ing some reasons, for which I wish this un-
happy being to escape the utmost rigor of his
sentence.

He is, as far as I can recollect, the first
clergyman of our church who has suffered
public execution for immorality; and I know
not whether it would not be more for the in-
terest of religion to bury such an offender in
the obscurity of perpetual exile, than to ex-

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pose him in a cart, and on the gallows, to all, who for any reasons, are enemies to the clergy.

The Supreme Power has in all ages paid some attention to the voice of the people, and that voice does not the least deserve to be heard when it calls out for mercy. There is now a very general desire that Dodd's life should be spared, more is not wished, and perhaps this is not too much to be granted.

If you Sir, have any opportunity of enforcing these reasons, you may perhaps think them worthy of consideration; but whatever you determine, I most respectfully entreat that you will be pleased to pardon for this intrusion,

SIR,

Your most obedient

and most humble servant,

SAMUEL JOHNSON.

June 20, 1777.

A Copy

A Copy of a Letter written by Dr.
JOHNSON to Dr. DODD the Day
before his execution.

DEAR SIR,

That which is appointed to all men is now coming upon you. Outward circumstances, the eyes and the thoughts of men, are below the notice of an immortal being, about to stand the trial for eternity, before the supreme Judge of heaven and earth.

Be comforted, your crime morally or religiously considered, has no very deep dye of turpitude; it corrupted no man's principles; it attacked no man's life; it involved only a temporary and a reparable injury. Of this, and of all other sins you are earnestly to repent, and may God, who knoweth our frailty, and desireth not our death, accept of your repentance for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

In requital for those well intended offices which you are pleased so emphatically to acknowledge, let me beg that you will make
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in your devotions, one petition for my
eternal welfare.

I am, dear SIR,

Your affectionate servant,

SAMUEL JOHNSON.

June 26, 1777.

To the Rev. Dr. DODD.

* He was executed the next day, June 27th.

* Written thus * at the bottom of the Copy, which Dr.
JOHNSON gave the editor.

E R R A T A.

Page 25, line 12, for human kind, r. human mind.

32, line 12, r. appears.

41, line 6, r. *true* taste.

